

This Just In: Eastern Alameda County Bird-Count Results

Jan 18, 2011

For the second year in a row, a team of 86 volunteers hosted by the **Ohlone Audubon Society** and the **Alameda Creek Alliance** performed a “Christmas Bird Count” to assess over-wintering birds in a section of Eastern Alameda County. The survey area was comprised of 31 public parcels as well as backyard feeders within a fifteen-mile circle centered near Highway 84 in Livermore — so chosen because of the region’s diverse bird population and potential habitat for everything from falcons to finches. Results were somewhat inconclusive due to inclement weather, but generally positive.

Much to organizers’ pleasure, this year’s count was performed by the same amount of volunteers and turned up the same amount of total species as last year’s. “Everything was linear from last year, so we’re pretty tickled about the way the whole thing played out,” said **Richard Cimino**, who administered the survey. The overall count was slightly down from last year’s, which Cimino attributed to the rainy weather, which kept many birds, especially raptors, well out of sight. But an astonishing 144 total species were identified over a one-week period, including two new vagrant species: a northern shrike, possibly blown down from Alaska with a storm, and a hybrid red-breasted-sapsucker/red-naped sapsucker, most likely from the Rocky Mountains.

Marquee local species identified in the survey included: golden eagle (11); bald eagle (2); red-tail hawk (140); white-tail kite (58); peregrine falcon (5); wood duck (81); and yellow-billed magpie (133). Hawk and eagle counts were artificially suppressed by the rain and therefore showed significant declines from 2009. “We’d like to blame it on the wind turbines, but we don’t think we can,” Cimino joked.

From here, the data will make its way to an **Audubon California** compiler, then to **Audubon New York**, then to a national database at the Cornell University Lab of Ornithology, and finally to the **US Fish and Wildlife Service** in Maryland. The annual Christmas Bird Count was established by conservationists in 1900 in response to an early American holiday tradition called “side hunts,” where teams of hunters would compete to bag the biggest pile of birds. To volunteer for next year’s survey, visit OhloneAudubon.org or AlamedaCreek.org.